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Winchester Select Board backs 8% water, sewer rate increase, pending Town Meeting vote

WILL DOWD | STAFF WRITER

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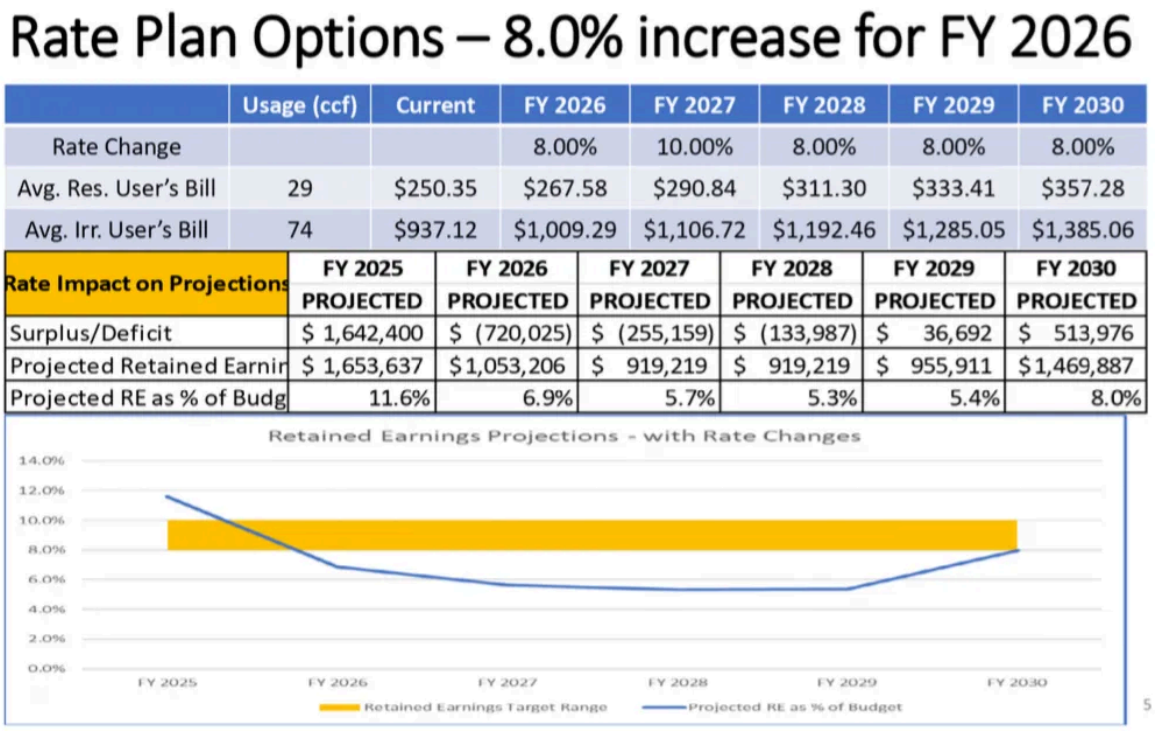

Rate Plan Options – 8.0% increase for FY 2026

	Usage (ccf)	Current	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029	FY 2030
Rate Change			8.00%	10.00%	8.00%	8.00%	8.00%
Avg. Res. User's Bill	29	$250.35	$267.58	$290.84	$311.30	$333.41	$357.28
Avg. Irr. User's Bill	74	$937.12	$1,009.29	$1,106.72	$1,192.46	$1,285.05	$1,385.06

Rate Impact on Projections	FY 2025 PROJECTED	FY 2026 PROJECTED	FY 2027 PROJECTED	FY 2028 PROJECTED	FY 2029 PROJECTED	FY 2030 PROJECTED
Surplus/Deficit	$ 1,642,400	$ (720,025)	$ (255,159)	$ (133,987)	$ 36,692	$ 513,976
Projected Retained Earnir	$ 1,653,637	$1,053,206	$ 919,219	$ 919,219	$ 955,911	$1,469,887
Projected RE as % of Budg	11.6%	6.9%	5.7%	5.3%	5.4%	8.0%

A look at rate option increases for water and sewer, as presented to the Select Board. COURTESY PHOTO/TOWN OF WINCHESTER

The Winchester Select Board unanimously approved an 8% wate
sewer rate increase for fiscal year 2026, pending Town Meeting ap

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late April.

The board opted for a moderate approach among several options presented during a March 10 public hearing.

The approved increase would raise the average residential user's quarterly bill from $250.35 to $267.58, a $17.23 increase per quarter or about $69 annually. Irrigation users will see their bills rise from $937.12 to $1,009.29 quarterly.

Even with all the rate increases, officials said Winchester still falls below most MWRA communities when it comes to the average residential water and sewer bill.

The Abrahams Group, the town's water and sewer consultant, presented several rate scenarios including 7%, 8%, 9% and 8.5% options. Each plan offered different long-term projections, with some showing steeper increases in subsequent years.

Select Board Chair Michelle Prior initially favored a 7% increase, but expressed concern about a projected 13.5% jump for fiscal year 2027 under that scenario.

"If we had a very good revenue year, and some retained earnings, why would we have to go up 12% or even 9% this next year?" Prior asked during the earlier Feb. 24 meeting where rate increases were first discussed.

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Matt Abrahams, a representative from the Abrahams Group, a financial consulting firm that provided an analysis of Winchester's water a rates, cautioned against banking on unpredictable revenue surpl

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"If you do have that rainy summer, you won't necessarily bring in as much revenue," he explained.

While some board members preferred the consistency of a level 8.5% increase for five consecutive years, Select Board member Anthea Brady suggested the 8% option as a compromise.

Select Board member Michael Bettencourt emphasized the difficulty in projecting rate needs over multiple years. He understood the difficulty in compiling a five-year rate plan when the weather changes every year. Therefore, he favored a lighter increase on the front end, according to meeting coverage.

The rate increases will help fund essential infrastructure projects while maintaining adequate retained earnings in the water and sewer enterprise fund. Capital projects totaling approximately $790,000 are planned through fiscal year 2030, with only one already funded.

Major projects requiring debt financing include $600,000 for leadneck removal, $1.5 million for Woodside Sewerage PS, and $800,000 for Cambridge Street water main lining in FY26. The town also needs $150,000 in FY26 for MS4 permit compliance, with costs projected to rise to $200,000 in subsequent years.

Despite the public hearing designation, no residents spoke during the session. The recommended increase now moves to Town Meeting for final approval in late April.

The board also discussed potential changes to the service charge structure based on meter size. Currently, all users pay a flat $35 quarterly fee, but a proposed tiered structure would charge higher fees for larger meters, potentially generating an additional $170,000 in annual revenue.

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However, due to uncertainty about the number and size of meters in town, this change was deferred until after completion of the water meter replacement program.

Another option considered was implementing rate increases based on usage tiers, with lower increases for conservation-minded residents and steeper hikes for heavy users. Under this model, Tier 1 residential users might see only a 4.5% increase while Tier 3 users could face a 12.5% increase.

The board ultimately settled on the flat 8% increase for FY26, with projections showing a 10% increase for FY27 followed by annual 8% increases through FY30. Weather conditions will determine whether future increases match these projections.

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Rep. Michael Day helps House colleagues pass sweeping energy affordability bill

The following was submitted by the Office of Rep. Michael S. Day: Rep. Michael S. Day and his colleagues in the House of Representatives recently passed energy affordability legislation that would result in over $9 billion in savings for utility ratepayers over the next 10 years. The bill maintains critical

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Winchester gun owners face new training rules starting April 2

Public safety data How Winchester compares on firearms licenses in comparable Massachusetts communities Active licenses as of Jan. 25, 2025 — Source: Massachusetts Criminal History Systems Board License to carry firearms Firearms identification card Winchester and Marblehead are the focus communities. Peers selected based on comparable population size, demographics and suburban

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Sen. Jason Lewis, Mass. Senate strengthen fair housing protections for renters, buyers

The following was submitted by the Office of Sen. Jason Lewis: State Sen. Jason Lewis joined his colleagues in the Massachusetts Senate to pass legislation that protects residents from discrimination in the housing market as the Trump administration abandons its enforcement of the federal Fair Housing Act. Illegal discrimination continues

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Celebrate Women's History Month with Girls Leading Change

The following was submitted by the Network for Social Justice: To mark Women's History Month and International Women's Day in 2026, the Network for Social Justice is collaborating with club leaders from Winchester High School and members of the Community Health team from La Colaborativa in Chelsea and

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Winchester School Committee candidates bring contrasting backgrounds to Thursday forum

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stage

By Talia Ho | Correspondent Fame. Fortune. And all that jazz. This spring, Winchester High School presents “Chicago: Teen Edition,” a bold musical that explores celebrity culture, media manipulation, and the cost of ambition. Set in the 1920s, this iconic production is sure to leave the audience wanting more. Performances will

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Welcome Here’

The following was submitted by the Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church: On Friday, March 13, beginning at 7:30 p.m., live in-person and live streamed from the stunning Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church, Winchester, 21 Church St., join in with Syldason, a duo concert featuring Sylvie Zakarian,

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